

WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee
Minutes of 7th Meeting: 17th July 2012

Attendees

Chair: Nick Mason (Deben)

Attendees: Neil Bielby (Central), Neil Calbrade (BTO), Gladys Grant (Devon), Chas Holt (BTO), Heidi Mellan (BTO), David Shackleton (Cumbria), Shane Wolsey (Belfast Lough), Simon Wotton (RSPB).

1 Apologies for absence

John Armitage (Islay), Colette Hall (WWT), George Henderson (NIEA), Andrew King (Breconshire), Ian Lees (Oxfordshire), Andy Musgrove (BTO), David Stroud (JNCC).

2 Welcome and introductions

All attendees of the WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee (LOAC) introduced themselves. The Chair welcomed everyone.

3 Confidentiality and conflicts of interest

Members of the LOAC were asked to note that agenda items marked with an asterisk should be regarded as strictly confidential. The LOAC may add or remove asterisks during the meeting. LOAC members are asked to notify the Chair of any conflict of interest for any particular item and to absent themselves from the discussion, decision or vote for this item as appropriate.

4 Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

The Chair summarised the minutes of the last meeting and the action points were discussed:

AP/LOAC6/1 Online Leaflet to be distributed to everyone who returns forms – **an email encouraging them to sign up has been sent to those who have an email address and also submit data for other BTO surveys online.**

BTO Staff were asked for the percentage of visits submitted online.

AP/LOAC7/1 BTO Staff to find out percentage of visits submitted online for 2010/11 and send figures to LOAC

AP/LOAC6/2 Local Organisers to be made aware that a standard power point presentation, for a display/talk, is available for them to use – **details will be sent out with copy of the minutes from this LOAC meeting**

AP/LOAC6/3 Greylag Geese to be discussed at next Steering Group meeting – **deferred to the October 2012 meeting**

AP/LOAC6/4 Add to website instructions on how to submit counts that were not completed on the priority date or add a flag to Search and Download - **on-going**

AP/LOAC6/5 Find out cost of producing/posting annual report. – **Cost of producing 3500 reports £5447 (£1.52 per report); Preparing & packaging 2228 single copies and 698 multiple copies £934; Cost of postage £1569.16 TOTAL £7950.16 (£2.27 per report).**

AP/LOAC6/6 Ask LOs to speak to counters to see if any of them would like to opt out of receiving a hard copy of the report – **request will go out with copy of the minutes from this LOAC meeting**

AP/LOAC6/7 Reproduce 'Total Numbers' tables on website, broken down into countries (England, Scotland, Wales & NI) – **to be included in the revamp**

AP/LOAC6/8 Contact LOs with request for articles of any kind including site in the spotlight - **done**

AP/LOAC6/9 WeBS staff to find information on what flock counting programmes are available – **done**

AP/LOAC7/2 More information on the flock counting programmes to be sent out to LOAC members

AP/LOAC6/10 LOs to inform WeBS of any suitable venues for courses close to wetland areas – **request will go out with copy of the minutes from this LOAC meeting**

NM suggested Minsmere as a possible site for a training course. ShW has plans to run two courses in September in Northern Ireland.

AP/LOAC6/11 WeBS staff to contact LOs to ask for list of vacant, high priority sites that can be passed to BTO RRs – **will be sent out with copy of the minutes from this LOAC meeting**

The question of the current turnover of WeBS volunteers was raised, HM to look into this.

AP/LOAC7/3 HM to find out the turnover of WeBS counters

AP/LOAC6/12 WeBS staff to pass on contact details of BTO RRs to WeBS LOs – **this is available on the BTO website but will also be sent out with copy of the minutes from this LOAC meeting**

AP/LOAC6/13 WeBS staff to create a “bird/site of the week” feature on Facebook and website.

As WeBS is always behind with its data submission there is often not enough information readily available to fulfil a ‘bird of the week’ slot for Facebook etc. If this were to go ahead data from the previous winter and interesting articles from other surveys across the UK would have to be used. It was suggested that a ‘site of the month’ feature might be easier to fulfil and could be used to highlight sites that are in need of counters.

AP/LOAC7/4 WeBS staff to look at putting together a ‘site of the month’ feature.

AP/LOAC6/14 WeBS staff to look into how these videos could be produced (whether videos already exist or if there is equipment/computer software available that will allow us to produce our own) - **on-going**

AP/LOAC6/15 WeBS staff to contact Country Agencies with list of resources once LT maps all online. **done**

AP/LOAC6/16 WeBS staff to speak to IS about how missed counts and paper forms are recorded in the ‘Manage my Team’ section. **done**

AP/LOAC6/17 WeBS staff to alter Online Development Document to show online submission checks and county summary outputs as high priority. **done – county summary outputs will be worked on as part of the revamp**

AP/LOAC6/18 WeBS Steering Group to reassess which species should be analysed through WeBS (eg Dippers & pipits). **done – it was decided these species are best monitored via the breeding surveys.**

AP/LOAC6/19 Rutland attendees to gather public views on 2010/11 winter mortality rates. **done – general feeling has been that there wasn’t a large increase to the mortality rate as there were no reports of large numbers of dead birds.**

AP/LOAC6/20 WeBS staff to produce article about how WeBS data are used for the next newsletter. **done**

AP/LOAC6/21 David Stroud to check to see if he has a copy of the 1993 flow diagram. **on-going**

AP/LOAC6/22 Pre-WeBS reports used to map the roost sites, WeBS Steering Group to look at this to decide whether this needs to be revisited. **done – a way for mapping roost sites has been added to the website development list and will be worked on once the current boundary mapping tool has been finished.**

5 WeBS Progress Update

WeBS revamp/workshop

A WeBS workshop is to be held on 6th September, WeBS Stakeholders and people who will be using the data have been invited to discuss what is wanted/needed in terms of reporting, what it will look like etc.

We are intending to produce a slimmed down version of the report with the country and county reports being produced online. This will enable counters and online users to be able to view data that are more relevant to them.

The WeBS Alerts will also be included in the WeBS revamp.

Members of the LOAC have all been invited to attend and CH will send out more details closer to the time. CH will also be sending out a questionnaire to all those invited to attend the workshop. If LOAC members are unable to attend please complete the questionnaire and return it with any additional ideas or suggestions you have for the revamp.

WITUK

The current WeBS report is in the draft stage and will soon be ready for Partner comments. We were still hoping to publish the report in time for the Rutland BirdFair but, due to problems with running the analysis, this is looking increasingly unlikely.

AP/LOAC7/5 HM to circulate an email to confirm whether or not the report will be available at Rutland.

Newsletter

The next Newsletter is due out in the spring of 2013, as always we are on the look-out for articles from Local Organisers or counters about their site, experiences when out counting for WeBS or any anecdotes along a WeBS theme. If you have a story you'd like to share please contact Neil Calbrade so that he can allocate a space in the Newsletter. Articles will need to be with Neil by the end of February.

WeBS Training

Two beginners courses were held at the BTO this past winter. Although they are well received by the attendees the recruitment rate from these events is very low. Therefore this year, with the help of Jim Scott from the RSPB, we intend to hold a more advanced training session on the Wash. The aim being to attract more volunteers to WeBS.

We will also be running an advanced training session at the Ribble Estuary for their counter team.

AP/LOAC7/6 Local Organisers are invited to suggest suitable venues for future training sessions, please contact Neil Calbrade with details.

ShW held a similar training session at Castle Espie last winter that attracted 28 attendees. 50% of the attendees took up counting for WeBS.

LT Report

An email has been sent to the WeBS Partners requesting suggestions for sites to be covered this coming winter. NM confirmed that he would be willing to organise Low Tide counts for the Deben.

The Ribble Estuary will hopefully be counted this year with the help of the local RSPB. The Mersey estuary is overdue but due to the diminishing number of counters on the Mersey it is proving difficult to get adequate coverage.

SiW confirmed that he has sent an email out requesting suggestions for sites.

Local Organisers are asked to contact Neil Calbrade if their team would like to conduct Low Tide counts for their site.

Water Rail Trial

Judith Smith sent in an interesting article about using tape lures when recording Water Rail. We would very much like to go ahead with a trial this winter, however, there are still a few issues with methodology that require some additional thought. Scottish counters have been using tape lures for years and NC will be working closely with them. We are hoping to be able to offer MP3s that can be downloaded from the website. It is noted that not all counters taking part in the trial will have access to MP3 players and that CDs will also need to be made available.

This winter we would be looking to run a pilot survey around the WeBS counts and running a series of trials over the winter with half a dozen counters and sites. Our aim is to have the methodology worked out and sent to the counters taking part by the end of October.

Old NWC data

There are still several boxes of old National Wildfowl Count forms waiting to be processed for inputting. Another request for volunteers to help with the inputting went out in the recent Newsletter. This time we had a much better response and have increased our volunteer team from two to ten full-time inputters with another 4 volunteers who only wish to enter data for their county. We have been working on the forms for about a year to 18 months and so far we have managed to input 2466 forms. As each form can contain anything from a single visit up to seven visits, this figure does not represent the total number of visits input so far. There are still over 16,500 forms that require inputting.

HM is putting together a plan of action to get as many of the forms input as possible over the coming months and will be putting together a summary of what has been input so far for the Steering Group meeting in October.

AP/LOAC7/7 HM to circulate the NWC form inputting summary to LOAC members.

6 Counter Network

Key sites compendium

We are reassessing the key sites for each county by working through our stratification database to find sites of a suitable size that we should try to get covered. We are in the process of putting together maps showing all the waterbodies in a region/county. Each map will also have a list of all the waterbodies with an area of 5 hectares or larger. An example of a map and list is included at the end of these minutes. Those waterbodies without a WeBS name or NWC code have not been counted for WeBS and coverage should be found as a matter of priority.

Several suggestions were made to improve the map and list, including swapping the colour of rivers with the colour of lakes, providing an excel version of the list to make it more user-friendly.

As Northern Ireland has not been covered by the stratification database yet we will not be able to produce the maps and lists for NI regions.

AP/LOAC7/8 NC to find out why NI not included in the stratification and report back to ShW.

It was also noted that we need to highlight that uncounted, existing WeBS sites are of a higher priority than those not currently being counted.

AP/LOAC7/9 WeBS staff to add a note to online lists in the Local Organiser website page highlighting that, where possible, existing WeBS sites should be covered as a higher priority than finding counters for new sites.

Finding regional data inputters

There are still several hundred forms being processed by the WeBS office each year. A large proportion of Local Organisers already input the data from forms for their region or have a volunteer to input the data on their behalf.

The idea of finding regional data inputters for those Local Organisers who are unable to input the data themselves was raised at a recent internal WeBS meeting. Having regional inputters would reduce the processing costs but would also mean that the data are more readily available for County Bird Recorders who need the data from forms a lot sooner than we can currently provide it.

The LOAC members welcomed the idea and were in agreement that the affected Local Organisers should be contacted for their thoughts on the matter.

AP/LOAC7/10 HM to contact Local Organisers who return forms about whether they know of any willing volunteers who might like to input the data for their region.

WeBS Mentor Scheme

We have had several enquiries from new volunteers about whether they could shadow an existing counter to help them gain confidence in counting for WeBS especially when it came to large or coastal sites. LOAC members agreed that having an unofficial list of existing counters who were willing to mentor a new counter would be a good idea.

AP/LOAC7/11 HM to contact all Local Organisers to ask if they have any counters who would like to be a mentor to new volunteers.

7 Website and WeBS Online

New site boundary mapping/editing tool demonstration

The WeBS team have been working closely with Warren Read from the Information Systems team to develop an online mapping tool that will enable users to define the boundary for their site or to amend an existing boundary.

Warren presented a demonstration of the work done so far.

Suggestions for improvement included:

- A) The maps are generated using OS OpenData (free of charge), see if maps with a scale of 1:25000 are available.

- B) The colour of the site you are editing should be of a higher intensity or have a flashing/more solid border to help it stand out from surrounding sites.
- C) The colours of the sites around the one being edited should be in accordance to the traffic light system so you can see at a glance if surrounding sites need to be amended.

There are still some problems with the tool working on mobile phones and some browsers but Warren is confident these will be solved very soon. LOAC members were asked if they would like to trial the new tool, DS and NB have offered to try it out.

AP/LOAC7/12 HM to send link and details to DS and NB and offer the same to absent LOAC members.

AP/LOAC7/13 WR to check with OS OpenData to see if 1:25000 maps available for use with the mapping tool

AP/LOAC7/14 WR to change colours of sites within the mapping tool and to make the site being edited stand out.

AP/LOAC7/15 HM to give WR email addresses of everyone trialling the mapping tool

LO Pages on the website

As discussed at the 6th LOAC meeting, NC has put together a page on the website that will only be made available to Local Organisers www.bto.org/webs/lo.

This page contains general information for Local Organisers (including key responsibilities; advice on how to organise the counts; how to use WeBS Online; how to process paper forms etc.); information about the LOAC; a basic version of a PowerPoint presentation for Local Organisers to use when giving a talk about WeBS; a copy of the Local Organiser job description; a link to the BTO Regional Rep contact details and will soon also contain the list of key sites for each region produced from the key sites compendium (see section 6).

LOAC members were asked to send any suggestions for changes/additions to NC

AP/LOAC7/16 HM to circulate link to Local Organiser website page to all LOs

Recent changes to WeBS Online – questions & feedback

LOAC members were asked for their feedback on the recent changes to WeBS Online. Three problems were highlighted:

- A) The upgrading/downgrading tool is very clunky and DS found it very difficult to get into the locations section.
- B) Not being able to edit data once they've been submitted under the counter's username is a problem
- C) The Search and Download facility does not give out zero counts when pulling out all species/sites.

Other suggestions for improvement were:

- A) LO's to be able to make minor changes / corrections to site names / Grid Refs (Site ref would remain the same)
- B) Adopt BirdTrack time recording criteria - to nearest 5 min rather than 10 min.
- C) Freeze the 'month' line at the top of the 'Count Summary' page

AP/LOAC7/17 WeBS staff to add the problems with and suggestions for improving WeBS Online to the online development document or to the online Bug Tracking System as appropriate.

8 Rutland Bird Fair 2010

There will not be a WeBS stand at the Rutland BirdFair in August this year. We will, however, be having a WeBS day on the Friday when NC will be available to talk about any WeBS related queries. As mentioned earlier, we are hoping that the report will be available for collection as usual.

9 Reports from Partners

BTO – The Atlas fieldwork has been completed, the data has been validated, maps are done and the species text is being written. Although the book needs to be with the printers by the end of August it won't actually be published until August 2013. There are still lots of local Atlases going on and the WeBS data have been fed into Atlas.

BirdTrack is an online recording system which has also contributed lots of data to Atlas. We've recently added the ability to record dragonflies through BirdTrack with over 1000 records received this week already. We are also hoping to be able to add other taxa to BirdTrack and ideally we would like to be able to link WeBS to BirdTrack at some time in the near future. This will require a large amount of redevelopment by the IS team but it is something we want to do. There are also hopes for the WeBS mapping tool to be pulled across to use in BirdTrack.

Andy Musgrove has been involved in updating the Avian population estimates. He is currently collating all estimates from breeding surveys. He was hoping the estimates would be published by September but it's more like to be January 2013.

A new report on the number of non-native species in Great Britain has been produced by the Non-Native Species Secretariat (www.nonnativespecies.org). The report includes non-native birds, plants, invertebrates and marine life, WeBS data have been fed into this report.

Bird Trends (used to be called 'Wider Countryside Report') has been updated. This brings together trends from the Ringing and Nest Records schemes, Breeding Bird Survey etc all into one place.

We are planning to run another Non-Estuarine Waterbirds Survey (NeWS) in 2013/14. The planned WeBS revamp will also be designed to accept NeWS data.

RSPB – Casework: There doesn't appear to be any decision on the Lydd airport enquiry yet. Severn Barrage seems to be cropping up again. Thames, Langstone and Mersey development proposals are on-going.

The National Spotted Crake survey has been completed, unfortunately few have been reported so far.

It has been confirmed that there are two pairs of breeding Great White Egrets in Somerset.

Bittern Monitoring: booming numbers are similar to last year, the Broads struggled with dry conditions at the start of the year and then some flooding so not much activity there. Somerset has had some flooding, but there are signs of late nesting attempts. There have been one or two new sites with booming – eg at Saltholme and Old Moor.

SPA review is on-going, WeBS data are being used for this and an article about it is planned.

WWT (via email from Richard Hearn) – Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme continues to operate successfully and the next Goose News, containing results from winter 2011/12, will be available in

early September. A new online database is currently being developed, using the Indicia model supported by NBN, and in the coming months online data entry systems will be introduced, starting with a system for submitting sightings of and receiving feedback for colour-marked birds.

The International Swan Census conducted in January 2010 is about to be published, with the Whooper Swan results accepted by Wildfowl and the Bewick's Swan results nearing completion (this is being done by Jan Beekman and others in Netherlands and Germany).

There are detailed surveys happening in August for Greylag Geese in Orkney, in order to both inform management measures and help design a robust protocol for future monitoring. Around 200 birds have also been colour-marked as part of this work.

The next 5-yearly International Greenland Barnacle Goose Census will take place in March 2013.

The recent passing of long-standing Local Organiser for Caithness, Stan Laybourne, is noted with sadness. Stan made an immense contribution to goose monitoring, and many other ornithological projects, in Caithness, for which we are extremely grateful, and his passing leaves a large void in ornithological capacity in the region.

As many present will probably now know (e.g. see latest WeBS newsletter), there are increasingly serious concerns about the status of many seaducks, particularly Long-tailed Duck and Velvet Scoter. Much is now on-going to develop improved monitoring, research and conservation action, largely being driven by the Duck Specialist Group. At the recent AEWA Meeting of Parties the need for a focus on these two priority species, and the issue in general, was accepted by Parties, and it is likely funding will now be available for a Single Species Action Plan for Long-tailed Duck, which would also bring benefits for wider issues related to the conservation of European seaducks.

In the UK, there is a need to thoroughly assess monitoring, research and conservation knowledge and data needs, and WWT and BTO staff, and other co-authors, are currently working on a review paper that will contain relevant recommendations.

The International Waterbird Census (Africa-Eurasia) is now on a much stronger footing thanks to approximately EUR300k of funding received from the MAVA Foundation. This will enable considerable improvements to be made over the next three years. Unfortunately, however, the sustainable funding programme proposed to Parties at the recent AEWA Meeting of Parties was not passed, so there is still a need to look for an alternative long-term funding solution for IWC over the next three years.

10 Any other business

WeBS data – county recorders

Concerns were raised over a WeBS counter who no longer wants his data to be made available to the County Bird Report Editor. The counter in question has fallen out with the CBR editor and has asked ticked the box in the BTO Surveys terms and conditions to say that he doesn't want his records to be forwarded to local bird recorders. His BirdTrack data are no longer available but his WeBS records can still be downloaded.

This was discussed and it was generally felt that if you take part in a survey to monitor birds, you should assume all your data will be made available to CRs etc. However, in this instance it is a Local Organiser who is collating the data to hand over to the CBR editor therefore the WeBS staff would be able to remove this counter's site from the LOs list so that the data won't appear in his downloads.

WeBS data – freedom of information

DS raised concerns about anglers who have acquired a licence to gull Goosander at certain sites within his region. He tried to use the freedom of information act to try to find out how many Goosanders and Cormorants have been shot in Cumbria under licence and what evidence was used to support the application and justify the issuing of those licences. The licence holders had not, as far as he was aware, used WEBS data as that evidence. However his main point and concern was that if high counts of these species appeared in publications in the public domain they may use this as evidence. This may make some counters reluctant to supply data if it could be used for this purpose and there might be occasions when there might be a case for site details to be withheld.

CH confirmed that the data for sites like this can be restricted, especially if there are schedule 1 species using a site, they can be undisclosed in the report. If anyone has similar concerns about a site please contact Chas Holt.

Awareness of LOAC

It was mentioned that LOAC does not seem to be well known among other Local Organisers not directly involved with the committee. It was suggested that each LOAC Regional Representative should be sent the contact details of the other Local Organisers in their region.

AP/LOAC7/18 HM to send email to each LOAC Regional Rep and cc in the other LOs in their region.

11 Date of next meeting

The 8th meeting of the LOAC has been provisionally set as Tuesday 16th July 2013, 10.00 am, at the British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford. TBC.